

ZYGOTE

As Christians embrace the miracles of modern science, Zygote despairs at the laziness of pizza lovers and the carelessness of people who can't find their way home

OH NOAH

Ain't it grand to know that American Christians are bang up to date with scientific progress? An Opinion Research survey reveals that one in 10 devout Americans admits to being addicted to their BlackBerry devices for checking emails, and verily, they cannot resist responding to emails while in church. One in three also confesses to the sin of using their handhelds while driving, and now Gold River Productions of California is selling Christian ringtones on its website, with the avowed intention of spreading the word of the Lord via mobile phones.

Zygote is bemused to see children being targeted in their inept Noah's Ark selection, where for \$3 young Americans can download 'genuine sounds' made by well-known Biblical creatures, such as dinosaurs. There's also a 'medium dog' ringtone, presumably in case anyone wants to get in touch with the spirit world.

Most educational of all is Gold River's declaration that its mission is to reach out to Christians "in all 220 countries in the world". Zygote would love to know which 26 countries he has overlooked, because his reference books can only list 194. Narnia?

COLD COMFORT

After finding that employees were leaving their PCs switched on overnight, at weekends and even

while on holiday, Peterborough City Council has installed software that shuts down any of its 2,500 machines when they are not in use. It calculates that the worst offenders had been burning an extra £60 of juice a year, and predicts it can save the taxpayer at least £50,000 a year, as well as saving the planet by lowering CO₂ emissions.

The system is called NightWatchman, and Zygote was girding himself to mock the loss of data it causes, but not so. If the software finds any work in progress, it saves it to a dedicated hard-disk partition before switching off. When the culprit strolls back in to work and powers up, a dialog box reveals where their saved files are. If all 25 million machines in the country were fitted with similar systems as a matter of course, we could save an Alp from melting.

DOMINO THEORY

Since Domino's Pizza launched its internet service in 1999, every eighth pizza delivery in Britain is now triggered by an online order. For those of us who can no longer type, let alone leave the house, Domino's has now launched a text-ordering service. Once a customer has registered for the service they can use their thumb (presumably the only part of them that still moves) to create special text names for their favourite regular order. And their credit card is billed

automatically, so they don't even have to reach for their wallet. No doubt they use abbreviated text protocols, so their favourites will be called something like Gr8F@Tw@.

BIO LOGICAL

A web-based system called MediSys has been developed by the European Commission to monitor public health threats, and Zygote thinks warm congratulations are in order. Its aim is to identify public health incidents that need a rapid response, and it constantly collects data from over 1,000 news sources and 120 public health websites in more than 30 languages.

The hidden agenda is to keep tabs on evidence of major threats such as bio-terrorist attack, avian flu or people glowing in the dark. The system fills a vital gap, because while local outbreaks have always been reported by the local media, they tend to go unnoticed by the wider community, and are rarely picked up internationally.

MediSys crawls the web and prioritises information according to the number of hits it picks up, and an automatic alert is sent by email and SMS to health authorities. During the foot and mouth outbreak in August, the system worked perfectly and alerted public health officials throughout the EU. Alerts can also be sent to private individuals, although this may be unwise. A warning of a plague outbreak would no doubt send

them fleeing from the epicentre to spread the pestilence far and wide.

HOME ALONE

The West Mercia Constabulary is warning drivers not to leave computerised instructions for their journey home programmed into onboard satnav systems. This advice comes after car thieves cottoned on to the fact that such information reveals the exact location of empty properties whose owners are away on holiday. Alton Towers car park is a favourite target. One hapless visitor lost £20,000 when his satnav directed crooks to his Shropshire home.

"If you must have a setting saved to get you home," advises Detective Sergeant Walsh, "only ever put in your town, don't use the postcode." Zygote has some better advice. Don't be a pillock – remove your satnav when you park your car.

CRIMEWATCH

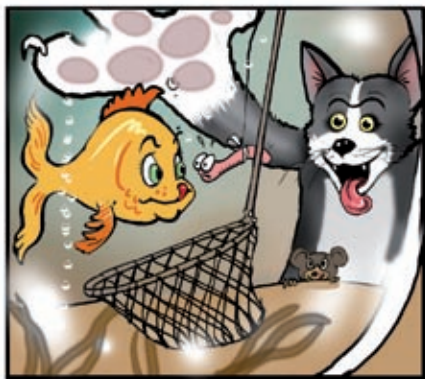
As it's the awards issue, it's time for Zygote to present his prestigious Computer-Related Award for Public Services. This year it goes to the US Homeland Security Department, the agency dedicated to fighting computer crime and cyber threats. Since the last awards ceremony, it has suffered 809 hack attacks, virus outbreaks and major security breaches. Spyware and tools for stealing passwords were found on its network. Its website was hacked and there were dozens of incidents described as "classified spillage", where secret data was discussed over non-secure email.

The chief information officer prepared a statement to reassure his masters that such incidents would not happen again, but was somewhat delayed when his laptop was stolen from his office. So congratulations to the winners of the 2007 CRAPS award. You are truly in a league of your own. **CS**

Great Moments in Computing
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238: ONLINE ATTACHMENTS



In modern times, the fastest way to transmit remote material is by email.



This is done online, over the net, as an attachment.



But recipients should never accept an attachment unless they have checked for Trojans, viruses and worms.